

# S E R M O N CXCVII.

## QUESTION LXXIII.

❁❁❁ WHICH is the Eighth Commandment ?



A N S W E R.

☞ THE Eighth Commandment is, *Thou shalt not Steal.*

WE have taken a brief View of those Duties which require Love to our Neighbour, in respect of his *Person*, under which his *Life* and *Chastity* are considered.

IT follows that we proceed to those which refer to his *outward Concerns*; and these also are reduced under *Two Heads*, the one pointing to his *Estate*, and is directed in the *Eighth*; the other to his *Good Name*, pursued in the *Ninth*. We are now to pass over to the *former* of these: Concerning the *Order* of which, I shall only Remark, That altho' a Man's *Good Name* be of very great Concern, and highly to be valued, according to, *Ecc. 7.1. A good name is better than precious ointment.* Yet his *Live-*

*lihood* is of more absolute Necessity; and therefore *this* is put before the *order*.

NOW *this* Command is, as the *former*, expressed *Negatively*; yet it hath an *Affirmative* part properly belonging to it, the right Consideration whereof will give light to the other; It is therefore most proper and Methodical that we begin with that. Hence

## QUESTION LXXIV.

WHAT is required in the Eighth Commandment ?

A N S W E R.

THE Eighth Commandment requireth the lawful procuring and furthering of our own, and our Neighbour's Wealth, or outward Estate.

THE Word used in the Command for *Stealing*, firstly and properly signifies, *a Close or private taking a thing from another, without his Privy*: But it is here used *Synec-*

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*dichically*

doctrinally for all manner of wrong done to another in his Estate; which may be done many ways, as will be hereafter considered.

IN general, *Theft* is reckoned to comprehend all *Unlawful Usurpation* of another's Property.

THE several Duties enjoy'd under this Command, are generally referred to the Head of *Commutative Justice*.

*JUSTICE* is generally distributed into *Distributive* and *Commutative*: But whether this be a distribution of a *Genus* into *Species*, or of a *whole* into it's *parts*, or wherein the true difference between them consists, is matter of Dispute.

I shall not here Commorate, only observe, that *Justice* is sometimes used for that *Universal Obedience* which we pay to the whole revealed Will of God, and hath respect to the Commands of *both* Tables; it being righteous that we render both to God & Man that which is due to them, by vertue of the Law of Special Government; Matth. 22. 21. *Render unto Cesar, the things which are Cesar's; and unto God, the things that are God's.* Sometimes it is put *distributively* with *Holiness*, Luk. 1. 75. And then, as *Holiness* refers to the Duties of the *First* Table, and *Righteousness* to those which belong to the *Second*; so it is wont to be Described, *A Vertue by which we are disposed to discharge those Offices to our Neighbour, which we owe to him, by Vertue of the Precept*: And so it graspeth all the Duties of Love to our Neighbour, comprized in each Precept of the *Second* Table: And this seems to be the most genuine Notion of *Distributive Justice*, and so it cannot stand *distributively* with *Commutative Justice*, as an opposite *Species*; but rather as a *Genus* to it, which refers properly to the *Eighth* Command: But I shall not insist further here. *Commutative Justice*, if we speak of it as a *Vertue*, is, *A Principle obliging & disposing of us to give every one his own, in the outward Good things of this Life*: And the Object which is comprehended in it, is both *our selves* and *others*; for there is a *Justice* which a Man owes to *himself* in this regard, as well as to his *Neighbour*: And this hath not only a respect to the Civil Laws of Governments, which can hardly be so Constituted, but that sometimes, *Summum jus, est summa injuria*: But it hath a main respect to the Rule of *Equity*; which tho' *Civilians* may distinguish from *Justice*, and accordingly have their several Courts for one and the other, and these Necessary, because of our *Imperfection*; yet in *Divinity* and *Conscience*, *Just* & *Equal* are *Synonymical*.

IN order to a more clear and distinct laying open of the several Duties comprized under this Precept, I shall in the first place offer some general Rules or Conclusions.

I. THAT God made this lower World, and the things of it, for the use of Man, and the Benefit of his present Life. It is true, His last End in all His Works is His own Glory, Prov. 16. 4. *The Lord hath made all things for*

*himself.* Rom. 11. ult. *For of him, and thro' him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.* But there is also a *subordinate* End or Use for which God made, and to which He appointed them; and that is it which is under Consideration.

NOW there is a double Life of Man considered in the Scriptures, viz. *Natural* & *spiritual*; and it is the former of these, for which these things were purposely made. On this Account Man was made the *Last* of the Visible Creation, having an House Built, and every way furnished for his suitable Entertainment: And he had a Right to, and Dominion over them bestow'd upon him by God the Creator and great Landlord; and he was to be God's Tenant, and hold under Him, and for that reason he was to do Homage for them: We have therefore his Charter that was granted to him, recorded, Gen. 1. 28. *And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every thing that moveth upon the earth.* And hence that Observation, Psal. 115. 16. — *The earth hath he given to the children of men.* Only it was under a Restraint, which is clearly intimated in that Sovereign Exception and Prohibition, mentioned in, Gen. 9. beg. Hence every thing in this lower World, was so disposed, and fitted with such a Nature and Operation, as should be serviceable to the Comfort and Support of his Natural Life: The Cœlestial Bodies for their Light and Influence to Succour him; and the Air for his Respiration; the Meteors to cause the Earth to Fructify for him; the Fruits of the Earth, and the Animals in the Land and in the Water to Support his Life, and render it Comfortable: Hence that in, Psal. 8. 6, 7, 8. *Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea and the beasts of the field: The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.* Which tho' it hath a Typical Reference to Christ, yet in the Type, it points to the first Charter given to Man in his Creation; tho' the Forfeiture made in the Apostacy was again recovered by Christ, and is restored thro' Him to His Redeemed: And hence God hath promised that as a New-Covenant Privilege to His People Hof. 2. 22.

II. THAT Man's Nature requires the Use of these things for his Support and Comfort, and hath a dependance on them, under God, for his Bodily Supply. There go in a Body and a Soul to the Constitution of Humane Nature; and for the present Support of the Union between these, it is requisite that the Body be upheld in Life, for by the Death of that, a Separation is made: Now the next End and Use of these things is for the preserving of this Union, and the affording to the Body the necessary and convenient Relief. Now God doth not usually do this by *Miracles*, but by

the ordinary Supplies of His Mediate Providence; nor are we to measure our Expectation by what God can do, but by the Course which He hath put Nature into: And tho' these as *Means* have an absolute Dependance on God's Influence and Blessing to make them reach the *End*; for which reason we are told, Matth. 4. 4. *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.* And accordingly we have that Threatning, Isa. 3. 1. *For behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts: doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah, the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water.* Which seems rather to aim at the Virtue of them, than the things themselves: Yet these are things ordinarly Necessary for the Continuance of our Lives, the preserving or restoring of our Health, and making our Lives comfortable. Hence that, Job 22. 12. — *My necessary Food.* And God hath for this End, put such a Virtue into these things, whereby they may answer this End: As, Psa. 104. 14, 15. *He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, & herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth: And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oyl to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.* And they are accommodated for all the Uses which are for the outward Man: Some things for *Food*, in both *Meat* and *Drink*, others for *Raiment* and *Ornament*, others for *Traffick* and *mutual Commerce*, others to *Warm* them, others to serve for *Utensils* to supply their many Occasions, others for *Medicine*: And there are none of these, but in their Creation, were some way or other serviceable for the Benefit of the outward Man: Tho' since the Fall, many of them are become *Noxious* to Man, by the Curse which Sin hath brought upon the lower part of the Creation; yet in their Primitive Creation they were all *Beneficial*, Gen. 1 ult.

III. THAT God hath not given these things to Men to be held in Common; but hath appointed that every Man should have his Share in them, wherein he holds a proper Right in them, and they are his own and not another's. I am not here Discoursing what Men may do in a way of *Partnership*, by mutual Consent, tho' that doth not in a true sense Contradiet our Assertion; nor yet what may and ought to be laid up in a common Stock for the publick Use of a Community, who are in that regard one Body Politick: But the meaning is, that God hath Ordained that Men should have a Property in such a Portion of these things, which no other particular Person can lawfully Dispose of at his Pleasure, without the free Consent of the Proprietor, so long as it abides his; but he hath a Dominion over it, as his own proper State: Hence that in Deut. 32. 8. *When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.* And we have that of David in 1 Chron. 21. 3. And were it not for this Appointment of God, there could be no such thing

as *Stealing* in the sense of this Command, and so it had been *superfluous*.

AS to the Enquiry, *Whether this Appointment were from the Creation, or was introduced upon the Apostacy?* [there being some who give this as one difference between the Condition of Man in *Integrity*, and now since the *Fall*; and thereupon some have pretended to be *Levellers*, on presumption that it is proper to a State of *Perfection*.] I shall only Reply, That tho', if Man had kept his *Uprightness*, there would have been no *Wrong* and *Injury* practised by one upon another: Nevertheless, this doth not infer that they would have held all in *Common*; nor doth it make this Command to be brought in upon the Necessity occasioned by the Sin of Man, any more than the other Commands of the *Second Table*, for there is the same reason for them all upon this account. If therefore this was a *Moral Precept*, and so perpetual, and founded in the Law of Nature, it must needs be from the *Beginning*; and by a just and necessary Consequence there must be a distinguishing between *Meum & Tuum*, because on this, the very Reason of the Command is grounded.

AS to the Plea which some make, from the Opinion of the Wisest of Heathen, who pleaded for a *Community* of Estates, as *Plato* did in his *Entopian Common wealth*; it is a poor Pretence to oppose to the express Command of God: And we know that he urged it, to have *Wives* also in *common*, which is certainly Contradictory to right Reason, and the Resentment of all Sober Men. Besides, other of the Gentile Philosophers oppugned him in it, and gave solid Arguments to Confute him. And as to the matter in hand, tho' their Arguments have a respect to the State of *Fallen Man*, (for they were not acquainted with his *Primitive State*;) yet they shew the *Inconsistency* of it with the Peaceable and Well-ordered Society of Mankind, one with another.

AS to the Plea bro't from the Practice of the Primitive Church in the Apostles's Times, mentioned, Acts 2. 44, 45. *All that believed were together, & had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.* And the Precept given by our Saviour to the Young Man, in Matth. 19. 21. *If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.* It is replied, that this Precept was *Personal* and *Probationary*; and we know that the Disciples of Christ upon His Call left their Callings, and their all, to follow Him, as *Jer. 27*. But this was *Extraordinary*, and was not *Common*, nor was it *Perpetual* to them; for we find what He said to them, Luke 22. 35, 36. *And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.* And as to the former, it is evident, first, That it was only at *Jerusalem*, and not elsewhere, and that

in a Time of great Distress on the Church ; and then, that it was but Voluntary, and according to what they determined in their own Purpose, according to *Acts* 5. 4. But this no way Contradicts the Right which the Law of God did from the beginning confer on Men to be Proprietors in that Estate which they came by in an Honest way.

AND whereas some of the Ancients pretended for a *Community of Goods*, they only intended, that no Man ought to count any thing so his own ; but that he ought when need required, to bestow it liberally, as a Debt which he owed to God.

IV. THAT *Ungodly Men have a true Civil Right to the share of Good things, which God bestows upon them in this Life.* We must distinguish between a *Civil* and *Spiritual* Right, which Men may have claim to, in the outward Benefits of Time. We before observed, that God at the first put Man in Possession of these things as His Tenant, and indented with him upon Terms ; and this abode firm so long as he stood to these Terms ; but when once he brake them, he made a Forfeiture into God's Hands ; for when he forfeited his Life, every thing else went with it, and God might have immediately Prosecuted him, and at once turned him out of all. And though this Right is recovered again by Christ, in the Purchase which He made and conferred upon His Redeemed in the New Covenant, upon their Believing on Him, (*Rom.* 8. 16, 17. *1 Cor.* 3. 22, 23.) yet so long as any abide under the First Covenant, the Curse abides upon them ; and whatsoever they enjoy *Providentially* or by Divine Permission, yet they ly open to a Writ of *Ejection*, whenever God shall serve it on them ; and they do but Dehude themselves, when they allot on a long Possession : Hence that, *Luke* 12. 19, 20. *I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee : then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ? And we are told, Prov. 3. 33. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked.* Nevertheless, God hath seen meet to magnify His Clemency and Mercy towards Men, in this Day of His Forbearance, in which He bestows his common Favours upon them, as well Wicked as Godly, *Matth.* 5. 45. *For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.* *Acts* 14. 16, 17. And as His Bounty bestows these things upon them, and favours their lawful Endeavours for them, so He hath confirmed a Right upon them, by His Word : And so long as they keep within the bounds of Civil Righteousness, their Claim, *ad Hominem*, is as good as that of the Godly : And tho' God may, yet Men may not, lawfully make a Seizure of their Estates, on the score of their being Pagans, Idolaters, or Strangers to the Gospel Covenant. God indeed gave a special Order to Israel to dispossess the Seven Nations

of *Canaan*, and take Possession for themselves, and He is Lord Proprietor ; but if they had done it of their own Heads, because they were Heathen Nations, they had been unjustifiable : We therefore find that God forbade them from meddling with others, though they were likewise Idolaters ; and gives that Reason, because He had given it them, *i. e.* by His over-ruling Providence, *Deut.* 2. 5, 19. And this discovers the Error and Vanity of those, who pretend that *Dominion is founded in Grace* ; and that on this account, all *Ungodly* Men are liable to be seized by the Godly and put out of their Possession ; from the abusing of such Passages in the Word of God, as speak of the *Saints inheriting the Earth*, as, *Psal.* 37. 29, *Dan.* 7. 32. *Matth.* 5. 5. and the like. Hereupon they think, that every Godly Man may Usurp the Possession of his Ungodly Neighbour, and that *Christians* may make War upon *Infidels*, and Disinherit them because they are so ; but this wholly contradicts the Tenour of the Scriptures, and tends to subvert all Civil Order in the World.

5. HENCE God hath given Rules in His Word, to determine what is a right Title to, and in what Way Man may get a Right in this or that Portion of these things. It is certain, that though God hath given to Mankind in general the Dominion over these things, yet there is necessarily a Partition to be made, and every one is to have his own Share, and not all to hold in Common. But now the Question is, *By what Law or Right Men are to account this or that to be their own ? Or, What Rule is prescribed by God for the determining of each ones Property ?* Some refer it to *Jus Naturale*, others to *Jus Gentium*, or the common Law and Reasons which all Civilized Nations agree in ; others to the *Civil Laws* of the Places where Men Live : To this I shall only say, that there are necessarily Civil Laws in the Governments which God hath set up in the World, for the determining of Men's Rights, else there would be endless Quarrels among Men. And for this end, that Men may know what is their own, there must be established Laws by which all Disputes on this account are to be determined. Nevertheless, there is a Rule of *Equity*, according to which these things are to be Regulated, and by which all such Laws ought to be Calculated : And this *Equity* doth not depend upon Men's Pleasure, but is founded in the Law of Nature and right Reason. And whatsoever a Man obtain by a pretence of *Civil Law*, yet it cannot suffice his *Conscience*, unless he can reduce his Right to the Law of God. And tho' there is no particular Direction in the Law of Nature, or the Word of God, about this or that way of dividing to every Man his share, but it is left to Prudence ; yet all is to be reduced to the general Rules given by God, and either written upon Men's Consciences, or in His holy Word : And the reason of this is manifest, because there is a Rule of Justice which is the Standard, and is unalterable,

terable, and must needs flow from God, who is the Supreme Law-giver: And this necessarily infers that there must be some way, in which a Man comes to have an orderly Right to what he calls his own, and by which he possesseth it: And so, if he comes to have it in any other way he becomes guilty of the Breach of this Command: For, for God to prohibit such a Sin, and not set the Bounds to Duty, so as that he may know when he keeps within, and when he Transgresseth them, agreeth not to the Wisdom of the great Law giver. What these particular Rules are, will be considered afterwards, when we come to lay open the Parts of this Duty. Here only observe, That as Mankind hath a Right in all Originally, so by this he can only challenge his share in particular; because his Neighbour hath a Right too. But this doth not Infer, that every one is to have an *Equal* Proportion, for there are many grounds in right Reason, and in the Word of God, why a *Difference* is to be made; and there are many ways in which a Man may alienate his Right, and it may righteously pass over from him to another; and he may sometimes in way of Violence or Injustice be deprived, and the Providence of God afford him no present Advantage to Recover it, as Experience makes it to appear: But still it remains a Truth, That whether by *Force* or *Fraud*, and *perverting of Judgment*, a Man be put out of Possession; yet his Title in the *Court of Conscience* abides, and no Laws or Customs of Men can alter it. Now Men may come to have a Title to the things of this World, either by a just Division of Inheritances, according to the best Rules of Prudence practised by Men, adjusted by a due Proportioning, by Agreement, or by an indifferent Lot, which is Cast without Fraud by them; or by a Right of Inheritance, derived from Ancestors; or by a Gift of Conveyance from one that is in lawful Possession, and had a Power to Dispose of it; or by Exchange, or a lawful Purchase made, giving in Exchange for it that which is Valuable between Man and Man; or by taking Possession of a *Vacuum Domicilium*, which was no Man's Possession before, or was Deserted; or by his lawful Industry, and God's Blessing of his Labours added to it, whereby he enjoys it without any Wrong offered to another: And all these things may come afterwards to be Considered. Only here observe, that God hath given Rules of Righteousness in all these regards, which *Honesty* requires us to observe.

VI. HENCE the *Affirmative* part of this Command, or the *Duties* required in it, are, *their closing with, and practising of, these Rules of Righteousness*. That there are such Rules, hath already been observed; and the principal of them may be afterwards considered in the several Parts of this *Righteousness*, which appertains to this Precept: For tho' it is not to be denied, that Men may gain an Estate in this World in a way of *Unrighteousness*, and by *Unjust Practices*; yet, this is not because God approves of it, that He suffers it to be so, under

His Government; but it is in His awful Judgment, and many times suffers them by it, to ripen themselves for Ruin, Psal. 92. 7. *When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish: it is that they shall be destroyed for ever.* And for this reason, it is no Rule for Men to judge of the *Love* and *Faith* of God, by their *Success* or *Disappointments* in regard of the things of this Life; for we are told in Eccl. 9. 2. *All things come alike to all, there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.* But if we would have these things and enjoy a real Blessing with them, we must see that we obtain them, and use them in a way of *Righteousness*: We are therefore assured, that tho' an Ungodly Man may have more of these Temporary Good things; yet, that which the Godly Man hath, though but a little in comparison of the others, is incomparably better, and far to be preferred in a true Judgment, Psal. 37. 16. *A little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked.* Prov. 16. 8. *Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right.* And there is no little part of the Love which is required by God, to be exercised towards our Neighbour, in a great Care to carry it Honestly towards them in all our Concerns with them about these things; and we are told, 1 Joh. 4. 20. *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen.* And the more ought we to observe it, because God hath made Mankind to have a great Dependence one upon another in the way of Commerce or Exchange of one thing for another. So that the Violation of this *Righteousness* tends to the Ruin of the Tranquillity of Humane Society. We ought therefore to Study much to be acquainted with these Rules, for our Regulation in this; because we are every way concerned in it, and cannot please God in our Dealings, except our Deameasure be Right. And if Christians would more Study the *Rules of Conscience*, and less apply themselves to find Advantages of *Civil Laws*, to over-reach one another, God would be more Honoured, and the Civil Happiness more promoted.

[ MARCH 6. 1704--5. ]

## SERMON CXCVIII.

WE have Considered some General Rules for our right understanding of the *affirmative* part of this Precept. It follows, that we proceed to a more particular laying open of the Principal and Comprehensive Duties that we are enjoyed in by it.